

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4368

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

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SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE GOVERNMENT CLOSED THREE BOGOTA UNIVERSITIES ON APRIL 2 FOLLOWING VIOLENT STUDENT DISORDERS. LABOR LEADER MERCA-DO, KIDNAPPED ON FEBRUARY 15, CONTINUED MISSING. DESPITE ITS PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, THE GOC CONTINUED TO IMPLEMENT ECONOMIC DECISIONS ALONG PREDETERMINED LINES. POLLS INDICATED THAT LIBERAL PARTY FACTION LED BY EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS WOULD DEFEAT ITS INTRAPARTY RIVALS IN THE APRIL 18 ELECTION. THE CONSERVATIVE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT'S CALL FOR A CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONAL FRONT, ALTHOUGH LITTLE HEED, UNDERLINED THE NEED FOR CONTINUED COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES. THE GOC RECOGNIZED THE ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. STUDENT DISTURBANCES. THE GOC ORDERED THREE BOGOTA UNIVERSITIES, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, CLOSED ON APRIL 2 FOLLOWING LARGE-SCALE RIOTS AND CLASHES WITH SECURITY FORCES BY SOME 2,000 STUDENTS ON APRIL 1. FORTY-THREE POLICE AND SOLDIERS WERE

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WOUNDED, EIGHT VEHICLES WERE BURNED AND ABOUT A HUNDRED STUDENTS

WERE ARRESTED. SEVERAL STUDENTS WHO BROKE AWAY STONED THE EMBASSY. THE STUDENTS WERE DEMONSTRATING TO PROTEST THE DEATH BY GUNSHOT OF A STUDENT IN RIOTING THE PREVIOUS DAY. SECURITY FORCES RESTORED ORDER LATE APRIL 1 AND ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL CAMACHO LEYVA ORDERED UNIT COMMANDERS TO HAVE TROOPS USE THEIR WEAPONS WHEN ATTACKED, A PRACTICE WHICH HAD HITHERTO BEEN PROHIBITED DESPITE A NUMBER OF CASUALTIES TO TROOPS. THE CLOSURE OF THE UNIVERSITIES UNDOUBTEDLY MEETS THE APPROVAL OF MILITARY AND POLICE CIRCLES, INCREASINGLY EXASPERATED BY THE BATTERING SECURITY FORCES, UNTIL NOW UNDER SHARP CONSTRAINTS, HAVE RECEIVED AT THE HANDS OF STUDENTS WIELDING ACID, ROCKS AND KNIVES. THE PATIENCE OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, WHICH IS ENURED TO CHRONIC STUDENT DISTURBANCES, HAD PROBABLY WORN THIN BECAUSE OF THE EVIDENT STUDENT DECISION TO HEIGHTEN AND PROLONG THE VIOLENCE (SEPTEL).

3. KIDNAPPED LABOR LEADER STILL MISSING. ANONYMOUS TELEPHONE CALLS, ALLEGEDLY FROM M-19 URBAN GUERRILLA GROUP WHICH KIDNAPPED CTC PRESIDENT JOSE MERCADO, SAID HE WOULD BE RELEASED ON APRIL 19, THE ANNIVERSARY OF M-19'S FOUNDING. IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT MERCADO, MISSING SINCE FEBRUARY 15, WILL BE RELEASED, HOWEVER, WITHOUT SOME FURTHER ATTEMPT BY M-19 TO GAIN POLITICAL ADVANTAGE OR TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT (BOGOTA 3344).

4. ECONOMIC MEASURES. IN SPITE OF THE DISTRACTIONS OF PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEMS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUED TO MAKE ECONOMIC DECISIONS CONSISTENT WITH EARLIER ESTABLISHED POLICY AND GENERAL ECONOMIC PLANS. CREDIT FOR EXPORTS TO ANDEAN PACT COUNTRIES HAS BEEN EXTENDED; THE PETROLEUM DOLLAR HAS INCREASED TO 29 PESOS; ANOTHER GASOLINE PRICE INCREASE WAS AUTHORIZED AND INTEREST RATES ON SAVINGS ACCOUNTS WERE INCREASED FROM 16 TO 18 PERCENT. THE LAST WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THESE MOVES AND IS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO NARROW INTEREST RATE SPREADS AND CAPTURE MORE SAVINGS.

5. POLLS INDICATE LLERAS WILL WIN IN MID-TERM ELECTION. POLITICAL POLLS ARE NEW TO COLOMBIANS AND SUCH SURVEYS SHOULD BE USED WITH CAUTION. NEVERTHELESS, TWO RECENT POLLS BY PROFESSIONAL AGENCIES--ONE COMMISSIONED BY THE FACTION HEADED BY EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS AND THE OTHER BY A RIVAL LIBERAL FACTION, FIRST FORCE (LOPEZ SUPPORTERS), BOTH INDICATE A VICTORY FOR LLERAS IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE APRIL 18 MID-TERM ELECTION. THE OUTCOME OF THIS ELECTION WILL STRONGLY INFLUENCE THE SELECTION NEXT YEAR OF THE LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1978-1982.

6. CONSERVATIVE MINISTER PROPOSES CONTINUATION OF NATIONAL FRONT. A PROPOSAL BY MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT CORNELIO REYES (CONSERVATIVE) THAT COLOMBIA CONTINUE THE NATIONAL FRONT SYSTEM UNTIL 1992 PROVOKED OPPOSITION FROM ALL SECTORS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. THE

NATIONAL FRONT, UNDER WHICH THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES SHARED POWER EQUALLY AND ALTERNATED IN THE PRESIDENCY, ENDED IN 1974. THE REYES PROPOSAL PROBABLY REPRESENTED BOTH A SINCERE EFFORT TO GUARANTEE STABILITY THROUGH BIPARTISAN PARTNERSHIP AS WELL AS A CONSERVATIVE ATTEMPT TO CONTINUE TO SHARE POWER EQUALLY, DESPITE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S MINORITY POSITION (33 PERCENT IN THE LAST ELECTION). THE CONSTITUTION NOW PROVIDES THAT POST-1978 THE MINORITY PARTY WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE GOVERNMENT ON AN "ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE BASIS". NONETHELESS, LIBERAL CONSERVATIVE COLLABORATION IN THE GOVERNMENT IN SOME FORM IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE WELL BEYOND THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION SINCE BOTH PARTIES BELIEVE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT IS A BEDROCK OF STABILITY.

7. GOC RECOGNIZES ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 31 THAT IT HAD RECOGNIZED THE NEW ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. THE RECOGNITION REFLECTS ADHERENCE TO THE COLOMBIAN POLICY OF "IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM".

(BOGOTA 3342)

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